



Asset-Building Ideas for School Teachers

To teach is to touch a life forever. Next to parents, teachers have some of the most powerful asset-building potential. In addition to the commitment-to-learning assets (#21–25), four other assets (#3: other adult relationships; #5: caring school climate; #8: youth as resources; and #14: adult role models) focus on the important role of a teacher. Below are some suggestions for what teachers can do to build assets. These suggestions are intended to give you some ideas for how to get started. They may need to be modified or adapted depending on the grade you teach; whether you are a classroom teacher, specialist, or resource teacher; and the nature of your school environment.

Asset Building in General

- **Post the list of assets** in your classroom.
- **Devote a bulletin board in your classroom** to asset-building messages.
- **If your community has an asset-building initiative, get involved.**
- **Orient all volunteers and support staff you work with to the asset model.**
- **Plan asset-building learning activities as part of the curriculum** (for example, service learning projects, social skills training, or setting aside time to read for pleasure).
- **Put an asset-building message on your computer screen saver.** One school used the slogan, "Wrap Your Arms around Cherry Creek Kids . . . Build Assets!"

Support

- **Greet students by name** when you see them.
- **Send a letter to parents about the idea of asset building,** and then use assets as springboards for discussions in conferences with parents and students.
- **Meet with other teachers and brainstorm ways to help students succeed.** A school in Wisconsin set up DATES (Developing Assets to Encourage Success) meetings that are designed to help students who are struggling academically.

- **Encourage access to at least one caring adult for each student** in the building. Homerooms can facilitate this.
- **Provide asset-building resources for parents.**

Empowerment

- **Teach students about the 40 assets and help them set goals for assets they want to develop** (one resource for this is *What Teens Need to Succeed*, published by Free Spirit Publishing and available from Search Institute).
- **Provide opportunities for service-learning.** Help students plan and make decisions about providing service to others.
- **Empower students by encouraging them to tell their stories** through written and visual autobiographies.

Boundaries and Expectations

- **Work with students to set school boundaries or rules.** Post a written set of the rules in conspicuous places: hallways, classrooms, the lunchroom, the gymnasium, and other common areas. Create copies of the rules and have an agreement form for students and parents to sign, indicating their willingness to stay within the boundaries.
- **Set high and clear expectations** for student behavior and learning outcomes.



Constructive Use of Time

- **Create visual symbols of assets.** For example, cooperative murals can show the importance of working together to strengthen the community. Art students can create self-portraits that reflect their assets.
- **Thank other teachers, staff, and students when you catch them building assets.**
- **Demonstrate sensitivity with respect to student involvement in extracurricular activities.** Some teachers make it a practice to always allow at least two nights for students to complete assignments.
- **Read biographies or view videos or films about musicians and other artists.** Discuss the assets students see in these people's lives.
- **Discuss current music, movies, or arts and entertainment and the messages they send.** How are these messages consistent or inconsistent with assets?

Commitment to Learning

- **Discuss the assets of characters in stories, history lessons, and current events.** For example, when studying *Romeo and Juliet*, talk about how asset deficits can lead to tragedies. Change the tale by building assets for the two main characters.
- **Use assets as the focus for assignments.**
- **Choose a quote of the day with an asset focus** and ask students to talk about it.
- **Introduce students to web sites that have asset-building themes.**
- **Read biographies of people who have realized their dreams.** Talk about the assets that helped those people succeed.

Positive Values

- **Ask students to gather information**

about their heroes—famous or not. Then have small-group or class discussions about what values these heroes seem to have and how those values guide who they are and what they do.

- **As a class, create a list of shared values.** See the positive values assets (#26–31) as a place to start. Talk about what it takes to uphold these values. Set boundaries and expectations based on these values.

Social Competencies

- **Provide a process in the classroom for mutual goal setting and evaluation.** Such a process empowers students and actively engages their learning.
- **Encourage planning through the use of student agendas and calendars.**
- **Use resources in your community to help teach cultural competence** (asset #34). Consider having students organize a diversity-awareness week, a cultural fair, or some other way of learning about each other's backgrounds and cultures.

Positive Identity

- **Use "strength interviews" with students to help them identify their assets** and their sources of support.
- **Attend concerts, programs, and activities** your students are involved in.
- **Congratulate successes** with a written note, a call home, or verbal praise.
- **Create life-planning portfolios** that follow a student from the end of one school year to the beginning of the next school year and include goals, dreams, and hopes. They can be an important tool for the student—and for teachers—to keep track of accomplishments and challenges.